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ABSTRACT

While research has outlined the nature of children's friendships as socialization contexts, the outline is drawn mostly in modal terms. Situational or contextual variations also need attention. This paper reports findings of studies of conflicts and the implications of conflict for friendship relations. The studies vary widely in the situations in which conflict was observed and in other ways, such as the children's ages and the measurement strategies used. Two hypotheses emerging from the results concern the significance of children's friendships as socialization contexts. The hypotheses emerged from the contrasting of conflict management between friends and nonfriends of various ages in various situations. When the social situation is open, friends seek to minimize or soften conflicts with each other in the rate with which they occur, their affective intensity, and the equitability of the outcome. When the situation is closed, and resolution alternatives are not numerous, friends are freer to disagree. Children's friendships thus support disagreements and oppositions, but this support varies according to the situation. It is concluded that contextual constraints support the continuation of children's relationships with each other. (RH)

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Contextual Constraints and Children's Friendship Relations

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Friendships as Socialization Contexts

Children's friendships constitute "settings" or "situations" in which significant socialization occurs. We believe this significance derives from unique qualities of the social exposure that occurs within these relationships.

Frequency. Time-use studies indicate that, when on their own and out of school, children spend more than 50% of their time with other children, most of it with friends (Medrich, Rosen, Rubin, & Buckley, 1982), and that this increases during adolescence (Czikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984). Considering what we know about the psychology of learning, this is not trivial information.

Clarity and consistency. Friendships require that children know their own needs and goals clearly, know the needs and goals of their companions, and have the ability to interpret cues and feedback from them. Communication clarity and connectedness in the earliest contacts between children are among the best predictors of "becoming friends" (Gottman, 1983) and remain important in sustaining these relationships. Establishing common ground and discovering reasonable ways to deal with conflict also are important to both "becoming friends" and "being friends." Thus, consistency and clarity in communication would seem to be distinctive features of social exposure in these contexts.

Significance. When asked about the people who are "important" to them,

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children and adolescents invariably put their parents and their friends at the top of the list because these individuals supply them with significant gratifications (Blyth, Hill, & Thiel, 1982). Other studies indicate that both the initial attraction of two individuals for one another and deeper commitments between them come about when they provide rewards to one another that are not readily available elsewhere, are sufficient in magnitude to have a motivating effect, and the exchange is perceived as likely to continue in the future (see Hartup, 1983). Exchange or equity theory is built around these notions.

Contemporary studies. Contemporary studies tell us a considerable amount about the transmission mechanisms occurring in children's interactions with their friends. Direct tuition occurs there, and resembles adult teaching in many ways (Ludeke & Hartup, 1983); communication tends to be well-connected (see above), and friends are interactive and explicit in furnishing one another with corrective feedback (Newcomb and Brady, 1982; Nelson & Aboud, 1986). At the same time, we don't know much about the identification that occurs between friends (nor the individual differences that flow from it). Imitation occurs readily among children, though, especially when favorable status differentials exist between them (Thelen & Kirkland, 1976).

Some investigators have described friendships transactionally,assuming that children derive more than individual attributes from these relationships. For example, children may carry forward "relationship roles" or "working models" of their friendships in a manner that is similar to the way residuals from adult-child attachments are carried forward in development (Bowlby, 1969; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985). This literature shows that:

a) Cooperation and reciprocity emerge rather early and rather generally as bilateral manifestations of what children come to know as "being friends." Cooperative interactions are relevant to "becoming friends" as well as to friendship maintenance. Play is more harmonious, resources are utilized more effectively, and mutuality in problem-solving is more evident between friends than between acquaintances or strangers. These differences have been documented in many different situations, seeming to be friendship "universals" (see Hartup, 1989).

b) Competition seems to work against the maintenance of friendship relations although there is considerable evidence to suggest that these effects depend on context. Children and adolescents believe generally that friends should not compete with one another (Berndt, 1985) but sometimes competition occurs more frequently between friends than between nonfriends (see below).

c) Relatively little attention has been given to conflicts in friendship relations, although conflicts certainly occur within them. Recently, though, we've discovered that disagreements arising spontaneously between children are less intense and are resolved less commonly by insistence than are conflicts between nonfriends (Hartup, Laursen, Stewart, & Eastenson, 1988; Vespo & Caplan, 1988). Friends thus seem to resolve conflicts in ways that will ensure the continuation of their relationships with one another. One can assume that children learn more effective methods of conflict resolution in these relationships than they might otherwise, and that these strategies for resolving conflicts may be carried into subsequent social relations.

Contextual Variations

The general nature of children's friendships as socialization contexts is thus outlined fairly well. This outline, however, is drawn mostly in

modal terms. Considerable from variation from friendship to friendship is evident. Almost always, however,we ignore these deviations as unwanted "noise." Such variations may be significant (e.g., in differentiating stable from non-stable friendships or in accounting for the varying degrees of influence that friends have with one another) but are examined rarely. Situational or contextual variations need attention, too, most especially for determining the functional significance of children's friendships.

Close relationships, including children's relationships with other children, can also be regarded as adaptational entities. Relationships and their constituent interactions, however, are not likely to be situation specific. In that event, different relationships would be required for every situation the child encounters. Instead (and more parsimoniously) most close relationships have evolved with considerable cross-situational utility, and most support <u>different kinds of transactions</u> between individuals according to the situation.

The earliest attachments between children and their caregivers, for example, support exploration when the child is not afraid and the surround contains novel elements, but support clinging and proximity-seeking when the child is afraid or the situation is dull and boring. What about friends in strange situations? These relationships, too, are known to support exploration (Newcomb & Brady, 1982; Schwartz, 1972) and to serve a comforting function under mildly upsetting conditions (Ipsa, 1981). Secure base interaction, though, is greatly constrained with friends as compared with caregivers -- at least until adolescence. Separations from friends rarely evoke the extreme reactions that separations from caregivers do (Hartup, 1983; Waters, personal communication).

We suggest that the developmental significance of friendship relations

(i.e., their functions) cannot be understood without knowing more about the situational constraints that characterize them. That is, more and better information is needed concerning the manner in which friendship status and situations interact to determine social interaction.

Consider competition and its relation to friendship and self-evaluation. In situations that are irrelevant to the maintenance of positive self-regard, children are likely to be non-competitive and actually to portray themselves as less competent than their friends. In situations that are relevant to the individual's own self-image, however, children are known to be especially competitive with friends, enhancing estimations of their own performance and discounting the performance of their friends to a greater extent than the performance of nonfriends (Tesser, Campbell, & Smith, 1985).

One can enumerate many situational dimensions that might constrain social interaction between friends: (a) whether a "task" is involved in the situation; (b) whether this task leads to rewards via cooperation or competition; (c) whether the interaction between friends is embedded in a group situation that is competitive (e.g., two boys maneuvering a soccer ball down the field) or a cooperative one (e.g., two children serving on school patrol); (d) whether the task involves working for scarce resources or readily available ones (Charlesworth & LaFreniere, 1983); (e) whether many choices among activities are available or whether there are none; (f) whether disagreements can be avoided or whether they can't; (g) whether a wide range of alternative strategies for resolving disagreements is available (should they arise) or whether the number of alternatives is limited. Creating a "taxonomy of situations," as these constrain the interactions between friends, is obviously an undertaking of considerable magnitude.

Situational constraints may not be evident in some areas (e.g., cooperative interaction). Consider sharing: In two investigations, young children showed more sharing between friends than between nonfriends (Staub & Sherk, 1970; Mann, 1974); in one, employing a different paradigm, no differences were obtained (Floyd, 1964); and, in three others, children were more generous with nonfriends than with friends (Wright, 1942; Fincham, 1978; Sharabany & Hertz-Lazarowitz, 1981). Finally, Berndt (1981) observed differences between friends and nonfriends in sharing behavior according to the children's age and sex. Situational variance is likely to be similarly evident in assertiveness, aggression, communication, and many other domains.

Contextual Variations in Conflict Management and Friendship Relations

Our recent work concerns conflicts and their implications for friendship relations. Consequently, we draw on the results of several new studies (both from our own and other laboratories) to speculate about situational constraints in the management of conflicts among children, their friends, and their acquaintances (nonfriends).

Conflicts consist of oppositions or disagreements between individuals, not fighting (Shantz, 1987). The studies to be discussed vary widely in the situations within which conflict was observed and in numerous other ways: e.g., the children's ages and the measurement strategies used. Consequently, qualitative analysis is our method of choice.

Subjects and methods. 1. Our first study (Hartup, et al., 1988) was published recently in CHILD DEVELOPMENT, and concerned conflicts arising spontaneously (mostly in play) between nursery school children who were either friends or nonfriends. The disagreements were observed during unstructured activities in the nursery school. We also cite selected

results from a similar investigation conducted by Vespo and Caplan (1988).

2. The second study (with Doran French, Kathleen Johnston, and John Ogawa) consisted of 64 pairs of third- and fourth-grade children who were observed while playing a board game with either a friend or an acquaintance (a classmate). During this game, the children encountered a number of barriers that necessitated rule choices. Prior to playing the game, the children were separately taught a variety of simple, but explicit rules. In five cases, these rules were identical (e.g., when one's marker falls on a green space, one moves ahead). Five other rules taught to the children were different (e.g., one child was told that, when one's marker falls on a red space, one moves ahead, while the other was told that one moves back). Within the 15-minute session (the experimenter was not present), the two children encountered between 15 and 25 situations about which they had conflicting information. Disagreements about other matters arose with considerable frequency in these sessions, too (e.g., you're being too noisy). Selected results are also cited from an earlier study of disagreements arising while school-aged children discussed a series of social dilemmas (Nelson & Aboud, 1985).

3. The third study (the second author's dissertation) examines conflict events and relationships experienced by high school sophomores and juniors. The subjects (742 students) completed questionnaires, reporting the amount of time they had spent in social interaction the day before, including disagreements that occurred with both adults and other adolescents. For each conflict, the students supplied the following information: what the conflict was about; its affective intensity (both during and after the disagreement); the presence or absence of social interaction immediately following the disagreement; and the impact of the conflict, as perceived by the student, on his or her relationship with the

other individual.

Rate of occurrence. The observational studies of nursery school children both showed that children engage in more conflicts with friends than with acquaintances. In both instances, however, when scores were adjusted for the amount of time that the children spent together, conflicts occurred no more often between friends than between acquaintances. Friends only experienced more conflicts with one another because they spent more time together than they spent with nonfriends (Hartup, et al., 1988; Vespo & Caplan, 1988).

The situation was different among the school-aged children who were taught conflicting rules. Separately considering conflicts about these rules and conflicts about other matters (Slide 1), more frequent conflicts occurred between friends than between nonfriends, especially about non-rule matters. Co-variance analyses were conducted to remove the amount of conversation (i.e., number of conversational turns) as a source of variance from these contrasts. Even with this adjustment, friends disagreed with one another more often than nonfriends when the critical rules were not involved. Nelson and Aboud (1985) also found that school-aged friends disagreed with their partners more frequently than nonfriends during their discussions of social issues.

Consider that the conflicts among the nursery school children occurred during play, when numerous alternatives (including disengagement) were available. The school-age children's conflicts, on the other hand, were observed when choices were much more limited. A structured task was salient, the children understood they were to continue interacting, and the game obviously constrained the resolution alternatives available. Results from the discussion sessions devised by Nelson and Aboud (1985) similar.

Apparently, when interaction must continue and resolution alternatives are constrained, friends disagree more with one another than nonfriends. In these situations, we hypothesize, friends feel "freer" to hassle one another than nonfriends.

Still other results emerged from the adolescents' self-reports (Slide 2). Roughly 15% of each student's disagreements were with friends, while only 5% occurred with nonfriends. These differences remained significant when the amount of time spent in social interaction was used as a covariate in the analysis. This difference in conflict rate, while occurring in situations marked by numerous resolution alternatives, may derive from another source: what the adolescents come into conflict about. We turn now to this question.

Issues. Among the nursery school children, friends and nonfriends did not differ according to the issues they disagreed about (Hartup, et al., 1988; Vespo & Caplan, 1988). Toys and possessions figured prominently in the conflicts of both.

The situation differed, however, among the adolescents;[1] the nature of the disagreement issue interacted significantly with friendship status (Slide 3). More disagreements occurred with friends than with acquaintances, and the rank ordering among disagreement "issues" also differed. Friends disagreed most commonly about a group of issues that can be called "friendship relations," including "sharing personal problems," "being ignored," and "gossip, telling secrets, and tattling." Most common disagreements involving nonfriends, however, were "criticisms, teasing, and put-downs." One hypothesis to be enunciated, then, is that themes or

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1. Conflict issues could not be examined among the school-aged children since the board game was so salient.

issues become increasingly important as children grow older in differentiating the conflicts of friends from the conflicts of nonfriends.

Conflict intensity. Conflict intensities were examined in three studies: among the nursery school children, the school-aged children who had been taught the different rules, and among the adolescents who described their everyday conflicts via questionnaires. The conflicts between the nursery school children and their friends were less intense than the conflicts that occurred between nonfriends (Hartup, et al., 1988). The same difference was reported by the adolescents (Slide 4). Remember that the situations in which the conflicts occurred were similar for both the young children and the adolescents: the subjects were presumably engaged in activities of their own choosing; conflicts arose spontaneously; resolution alternatives were numerous; and, most importantly, the children could stop interacting with one another if they wanted to.

The school-aged children who disagreed with their friends, however, were more intense than were nonfriends -- both in conflicts engendered by the different instructions and in other conflicts arising at other times during the session (significant only in the latter case). These differences should not be interpreted to mean that friends' conflicts were especially heated. Mean scores (Slide 5) actually occurred toward the low end of the scale for both friends and nonfriends, meaning that the conflicts of friends were closer to being "moderately affective" than were the conflicts of nonfriends. Once again, when resolution alternatives were limited and interaction continuing, friends seemed "freer" in their disagreements with one another than nonfriends were.

Resolution strategies. Among both preschool children in free play and school children in closed-end games, "standing firm" was the most common

strategy used to resolve conflicts. Nevertheless, our nursery school observations showed that friends used standing firm less frequently than nonfriends (Hartup, et al., 1988). The observations conducted by Vespo and Caplan (1988) were analyzed differently but, in that case, too, nonfriends used conciliation gestures less frequently to resolve conflicts than friends.

Among our school-aged children, insistence occurred so frequently and negotiation so infrequently that we could only compare friends and nonfriends according to whether insistence exchanges ended with capitulation or disengagement (avoidance of confrontation). This cross-tabulation (Slide 6) showed that friends' conflicts, as compared with nonfriends' conflicts, were resolved by capitulation less frequently, mostly when the altercations did not involve the critical rules. Since, in this instance, insistence accompanied by disengagement is a relatively "soft" resolution strategy, the combined results suggest that friends seem to prefer "softer modes" of conflict resolution than nonfriends, except when resolution alternatives are extremely limited.

Conflict outcomes. Conflict outcomes have been assessed in two ways in these studies: a) whether winners and losers emerge as opposed to some other outcome; and b) whether the children continue to interact. The nursery school studies show clearly that: (a) equitable solutions, as compared to winner/loser outcomes, are more common among friends' conflicts than nonfriends'; and (b) interaction continues more readily following friends' conflicts (Hartup, et al., 1988; Vespo & Caplan, 1988).

Among the school-aged children, friends' conflicts ended in winner/loser outcomes less frequently than nonfriends' conflicts, and they more commonly suppressed overt disagreement (i.e., arrived at "standoff resolutions) so that actual outcomes were obscured (Slide 7) -- again when the critical

rules were not involved. Since these sessions were closed-end, interaction necessarily continued for the children, meaning that it was not possible to compare the conflicts of friends and nonfriends in this regard.

Significant outcome results emerged from the adolescents, too (Slide 8): More than 75% of their disagreements with friends ended with the participants staying and talking together; less than 50% of disagreements with nonfriends ended in this manner. Conversely, nonfriends split following conflicts more often than friends did (26% versus 8%). The adolescents' data also reveal that these exchanges have "mixed" implications for their relationships generally (Slide 8). Most friends and most nonfriends (62%) thought that everyday conflicts have relatively little effect on their relationships. At the same time, nonfriends regarded their relationships as more vulnerable to negative effects from conflicts (27%) than friends did (15%), while conflicts with friends were more often thought to make these relationships better (23%) than conflicts between nonfriends (12%).

Conclusion

Two hypotheses emerge from these results concerning the significance of children's friendships as socialization contexts. These hypotheses emerge only by contrasting conflict management between friends and nonfriends in different situations and across age. First, when the social situation is "open," friends seek to minimize (soften) conflicts with one another -- in the rate with which they occur, their affective intensity, and in equitability of outcome. Second, when the situation is "closed," and resolution alternatives are not numerous, friends are "freer" to disagree and to do so more intensely although clear confrontations are avoided to a greater extent than among nonfriends. Children's friendships thus support

disagreements and oppositions -- but varying according to situation. These contextual constraints, we argue, support the continuation of the children's relationships with one another.

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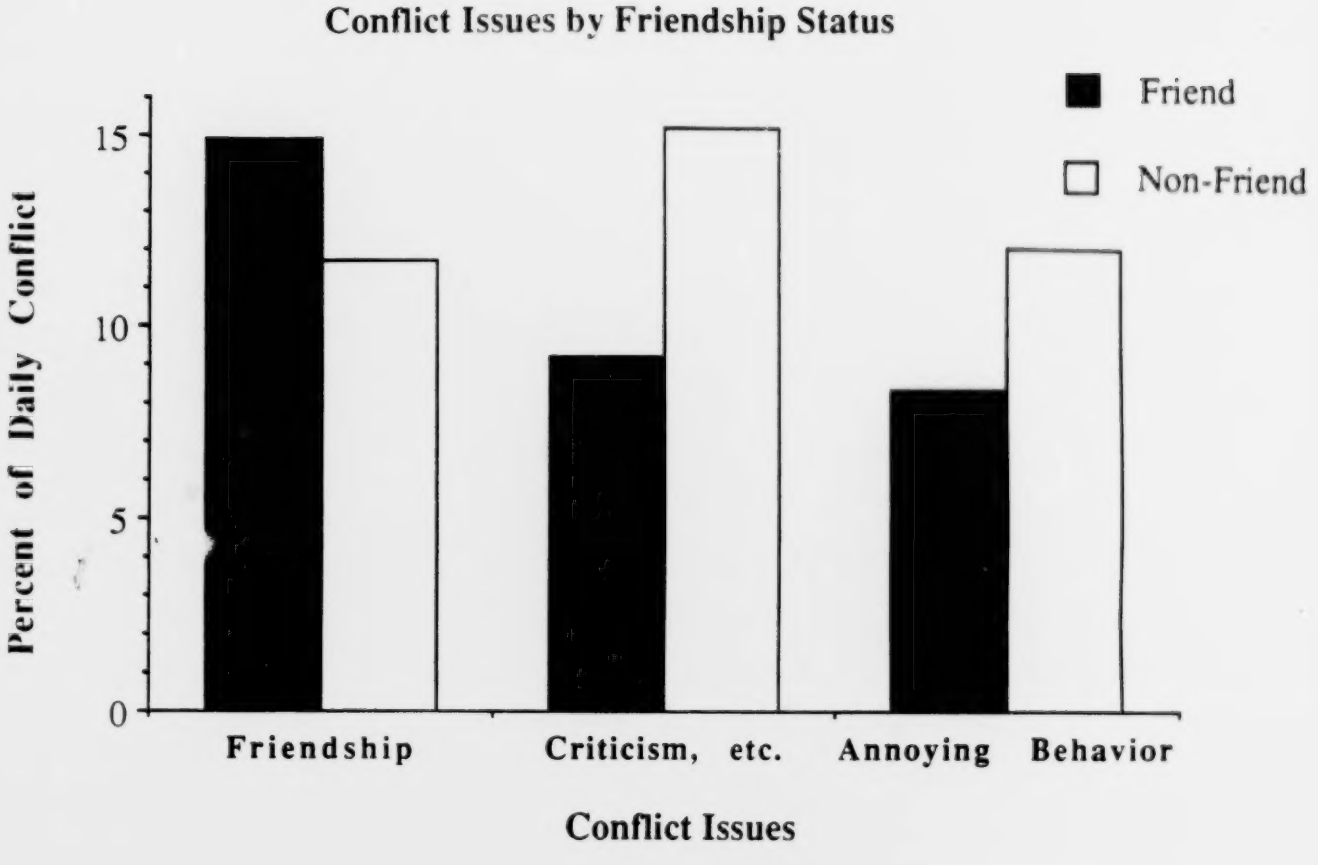
Mean Number of Conflicts by Friendship and Context
Mean Number of Conflicts
11
10
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
1
0
Friend
Non-Friend
Rule
Non-Rule
Conflict Situation

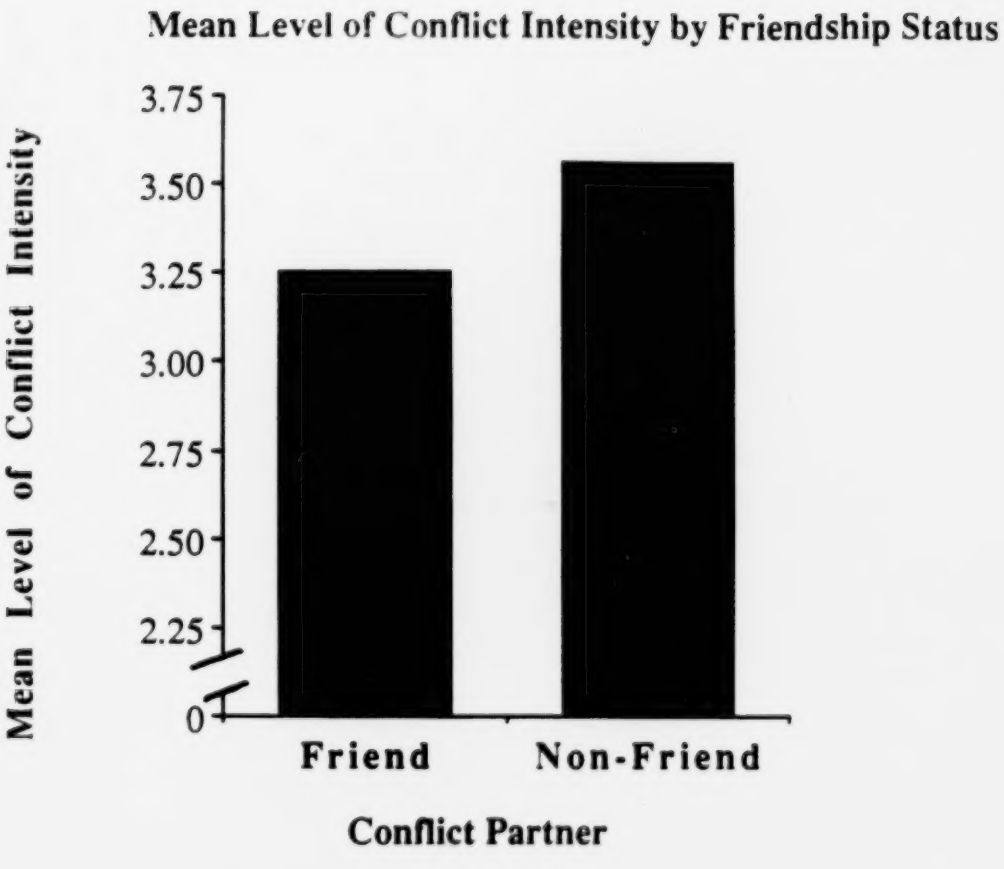
Slide 1

Mean Percent of Daily Conflicts by Friendship Status
Percent of Daily Conflicts
15
10
5
0
Friend
Non-Friends
Conflict Partner

Slide 2

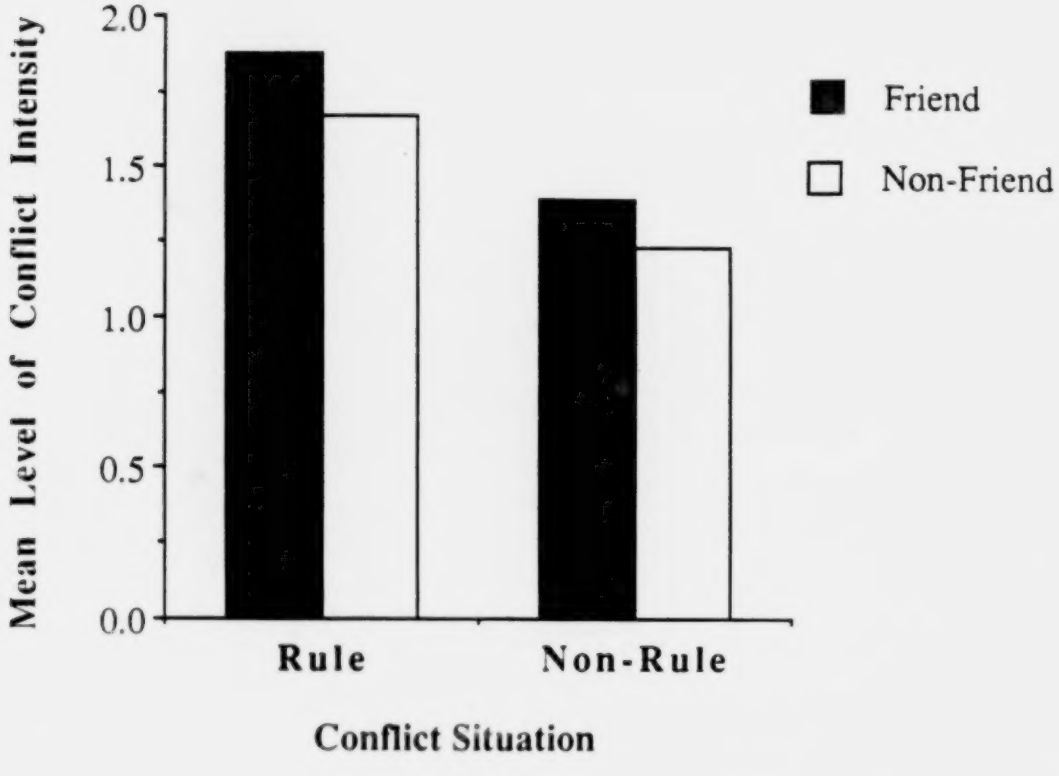

Conflict Issues by Friendship Status
Friend
Non-Friend
Percent of Daily Conflict
15
10
5
0
Friendship
Criticism, etc.
Annoying Behavior
Conflict Issues

Slide 3


Mean Level of Conflict Intensity by Friendship Status
Mean Level of Conflict Intensity
3.75
3.50
3.25
3.00
2.75
2.50
2.25
0
Friend
Non-Friend
Conflict Partner

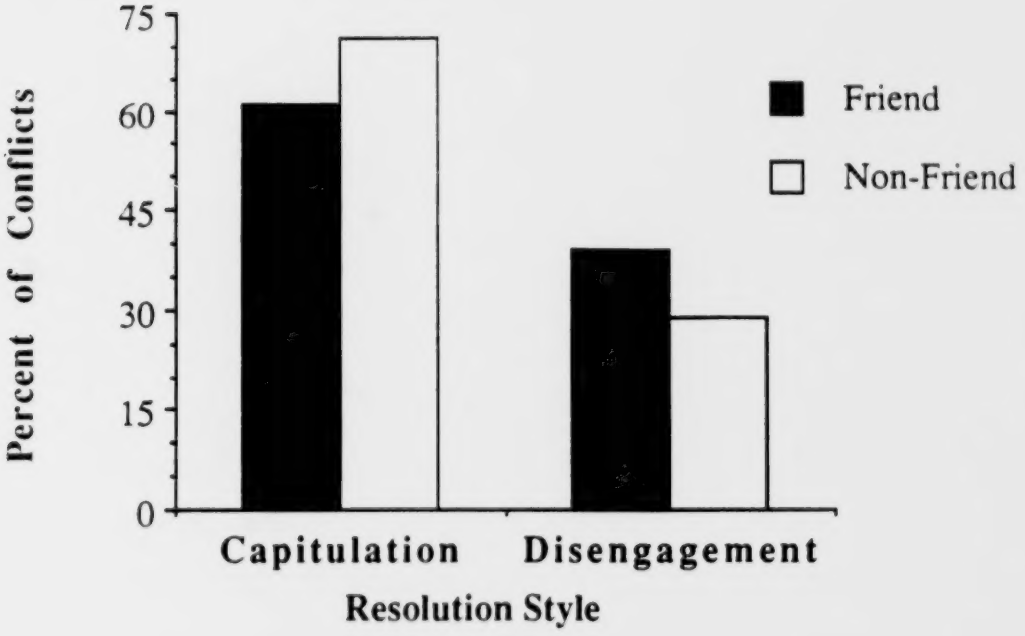
Slide 4

Mean Level of Conflict Intensity by Friendship and Context

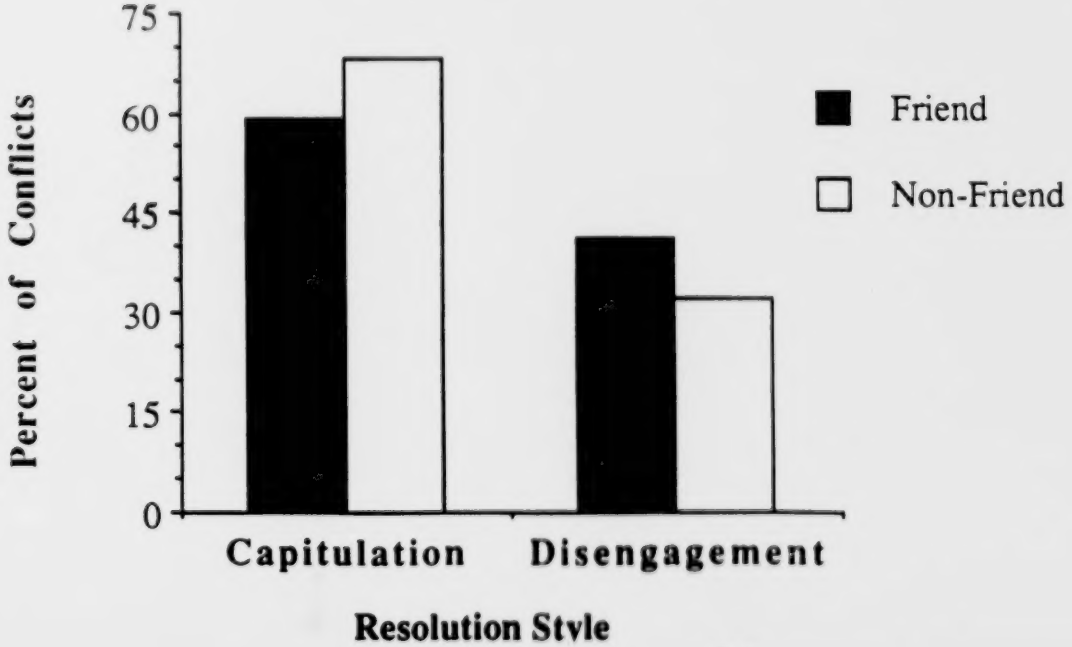


Slide 5

Resolution of Rule Conflicts by Friendship Status

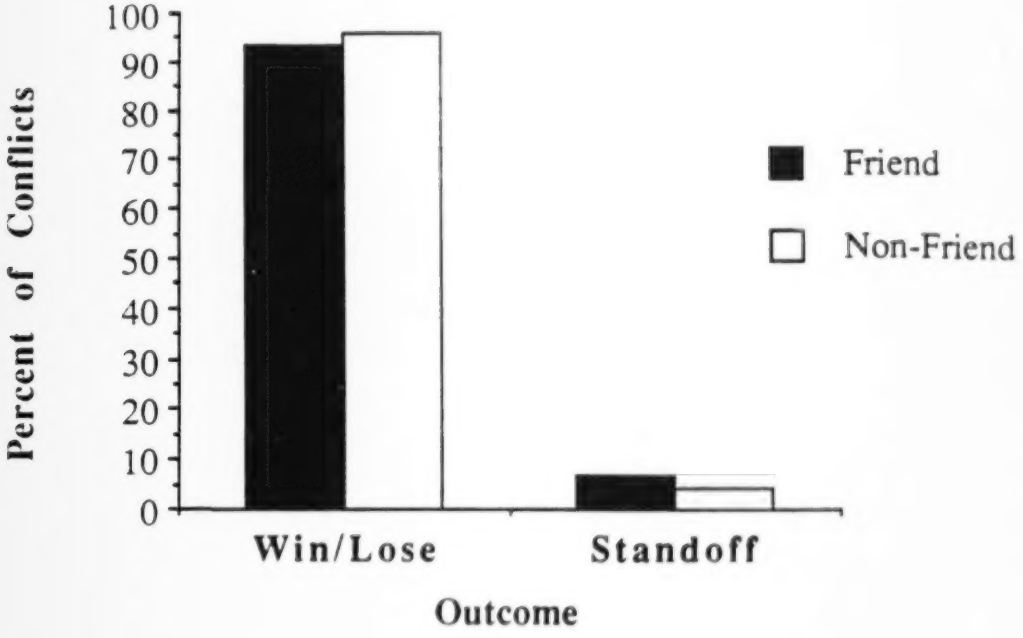


Resolution of Non-Rule Conflicts by Friendship Status

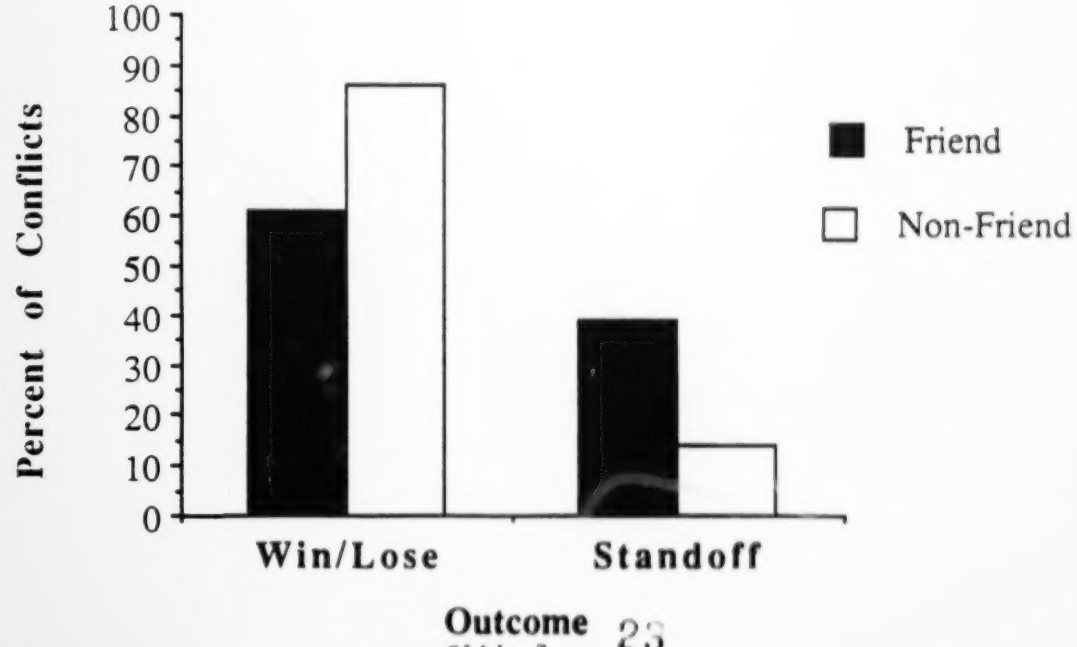


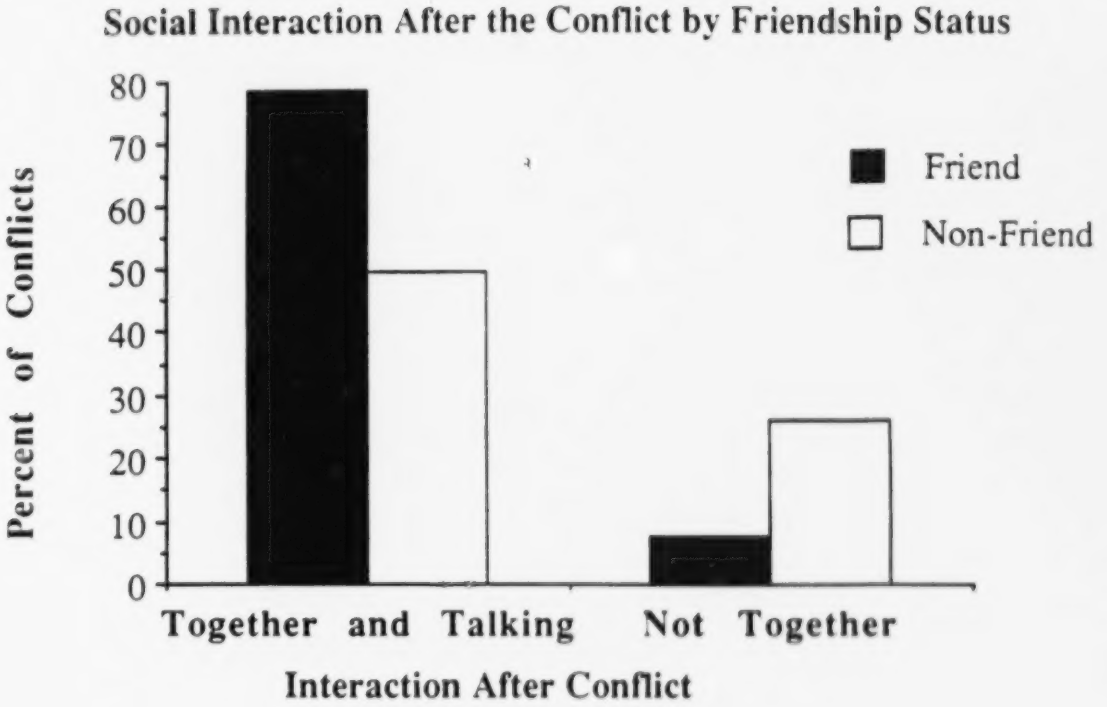
Slide 6

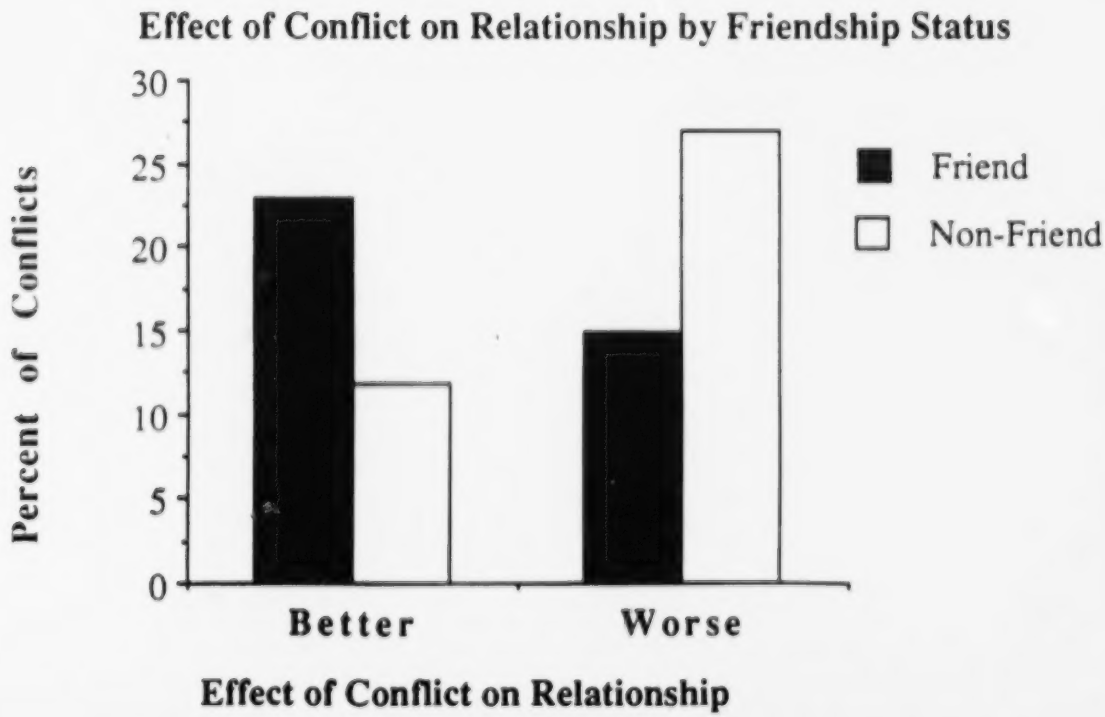
Outcome of Rule Conflicts by Friendship Status



Outcome of Non-Rule Conflicts by Friendship Status




Social Interaction After the Conflict by Friendship Status
Percent of Conflicts
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
Friend
Non-Friend
Together and Talking
Not Together
Interaction After Conflict


Effect of Conflict on Relationship by Friendship Status
Percent of Conflicts
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
Friend
Non-Friend
Better
Worse
Effect of Conflict on Relationship